

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 COPENH 03443 061657Z

47

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, EGEN, ELAB, EEC, DA

SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER CALLS NEW ELECTION IN DENMARK

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 COPENH 03443 061657Z

REF: COPENHAGEN 3427

SUMMARY. PRIMIN POUL HARTLING DISSOLVED PARLIAMENT AND ANNOUNCED NEW ELECTIONS FOR JAN 9 ON THE GROUNDS THAT HIS ECONOMIC "CRISIS PLAN" DID NOT HAVE A MAJORITY IN THE EXISTING PARLIAMENT. HIS MINORITY LIBERAL GOVERNMENT REMAINS IN FULL POWER AND WILL CARRY ON IN OFFICE IF THE ELECTION PROVIDES A CONTINUED POPULAR MANDATE. END SUMMARY.

1. HARTLING'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEW ELECTIONS FOR JAN 9 CAME AT THE END OF A TEN-HOUR DEBATE ON HIS ECONOMIC "CRISIS PLAN". THE DEBATE INDICATED, ACCORDING TO HARTLING, THAT NO MAJORITY COULD BE FOUND FOR HIS ECONOMIC PACKAGE PLAN (A WAGE AND PROFIT STOP, SUSPENSION OF THE AUTOMATIC COST OF LIVING WAGE INDEX SYSTEM AND STRICT CONTROL OF DOMESTIC PRICE INCREASES, ESPECIALLY OF BASIC AGRICULTURAL ITEMS). IN HIS CONCLUDING SPEECH HARTLING SAID HE FOUND ONLY 81 MEMBERS GENERALLY POSITIVE TO HIS PROGRAM (LIBERALS - 22, RADICALS- 20, CONSERVATIVES - 16, CENTER DEMOCRATS - 14, CHRISTIANS - 7, PLUS TWO INDEPENDENT MEMBERS), AND EXPRESSLY IDENTIFIED THE PARTIES WHICH OPPOSED HIS PLAN (SOCIAL DEMOCRATS - 46, SOCIALIST PEOPLES - 11, COMMUNISTS - 6, JUSTICE PARTY - 5, ANDMOGENS GLISTRUP'S PROGRESS PARTY - 26). HARTLING CALLED THE ELECTION ON THE BAIS OF HIS OWN ASSESSMENT OF PARTY ATTITUDES (BEFORE A PARLIAMENTARY VOTE WAS TAKEN) AND WAS THEREFORE NOT CONSITUATIONALLY REQUIRED TO RESIGN. HIS GOVERNMENT CONTINUES IN A STATUS OF FULL POWER AND NOT AS A CARETAKER.

2. HARTLING'S EVALUATION OF THE SUPPORT FOR HIS "CRISIS PLAN" WAS POLITICALLY MOTIVATED; IN FACT IT WAS CLEAR THAT HIS PACKAGE COULD HAVE COME FORWARD TO COMMITTEE FOR NORMAL MARKUP PRECEDING ITS SECOND READING. AS CONSERVATIVE AND CENTER PARTY LEADERS POINTED OUT, AND MOGENS GLISTRUP HIMSELF ADMITTED, THE PROGRESS PARTY WOULD HAVE SUPPORTED THE GOVERNMENT THAT FAR. AND TIME COULD THUS HAVE BEEN GAINED FOR INTER-PARTY NEGOTIATIONS ON THE PLAN. GLISTRUP HOWEVER WANTED SOME CONCESSION FOR HIS SUPPORT. DURING THE DEBATE HIS CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 COPENH 03443 061657Z

PROGRESS PARTY PRESENTED A MOTION OF CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT, REQUESTING THE PRIMIN NOT TO CALL ELECTIONS. AT THE SAME TIME, THE PARTY REFUSED TO WITHDRAW ITS BILL TO RESCIND THE TAX ON CONSUMER APPLICANCES WHICH THE GOVERNMENT HAD IMPLIED WOULD BE CONSIDERED A CONFIDENCE VOTE. ALTHOUGH GLISTRUP HAD THUS APPARENTLY SET THE STAGE FOR SOME CONCESSION, THE GOVERNMENT HAD NONE TO OFFER AND HARTLING INTERRUPTED THE DEBATE TO ANNOUNCE

ELECTIONS BEFORE A VOTE COULD BE TAKEN ON EITHER OF THESE GLISTRUP INITIATIVES.

3. IN A SURPRISINGLY TOUGH CONCLUDING SPEECH, HARTLING DIRECTED HIS ATTACK AGAINST THE SOCIALIST BLOC ON THE ONE SIDE AND THE PROGRESS PARTY ON THE OTHER, CASTIGATING BOTH FOR THEIR WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE IN OPPOSITION TO THE "ONLY PLAN WHICH COULD RESTORE FULL EMPLOYMENT", I.E., THE GOVERNMENT'S "CRISIS PLAN" HE EXCORIATED THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS, IN PARTICULAR, FOR COOPERATING WITH THE COMMUNISTS. IN EFFECT, HARTLING USED THIS SPEECH TO SET THE BASIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE GOVERNING LIBERALS' ELECTION CAMPAIGN. THEY ARE AIMING AT A STRENGTHENING OF THE LIBERAL CENTER IN DANISH POLITICS AND ARE PORTRAYING THEMSELVES AS OPPOSING THE SOCIALIST BLOC ON THE ONE HAND AND THE "ULTRA-CONSERVATIVE" PROGRESS PARTY ON THE OTHER. IF SUCCESSFUL IN THE ELECTIONS, IT IS HARTLING'S INTENTION TO DECLARE THE ELECTION RESULTS A CONFIRMATION OF THE LIBERAL GOVERNMENT'S POPULAR MANDATE. HE COULD THEREUPON REMAIN IN OFFICE, COUNTING ON THE CONTINUED DIVISION BETWEEN GLISTRUP AND THE SOCIALISTS TO PREVENT THE SUCCESS OF ANY NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE.

4. IT IS THE PARTIES OF THE LIBERAL CENTER, HOWEVER, WHO ARE MOST UPSET BY HARTLING'S DECISION TO CALL AN ELECTION; SOME OF THEM ARE FACED WITH THE PROSPECT OF HEAVY ELECTION LOSSES. THIS MAY CAUSE PROBLEMS FOR HARTLING'S POST-ELECTION STRATEGY. CENTER DEMOCRAT ERHARD JAKOBSEN, FOR EXAMPLE, PUBLICLY THREATENED DEC 4 TO LEAD A NO-CONFIDENCE CAMPAIGN AS HIS FIRST POST-ELECTION ACT IF HARTLING CALLED AN ELECTION BEFORE COMMITTEE HANDLING OF THE "CRISIS PLAN." HARTLING IS COUNTING ON THE FACT THAT IF THE ELECTION RETURNS A CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 COPENH 03443 061657Z

STRENGTHENED LIBERAL CENTER BLOC IN PARLIAMENT, HIS ALLIES IN THAT GROUP WILL OVERLOOK THEIR PAST RESENTMENT AT HIS SOMEWHAT CAVALIER TREATMENT OF THEM.

5. THE MOST RECENT GALLUP POLLS INDICATE THIS IS A CONSIDERABLE GAMBLE. FOUR PARTIES STAND TO IMPROVE THEIR PRESENT HOLDINGS, THE LIBERALS, THE CHRISTIANS, THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS AND THE COMMUNISTS. POPULAR SUPPORT FOR THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS, HOWEVER, HAS BEEN ERODING STEADILY DURING THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS. ON THE OTHER SIDE, ALTHOUGH STILL A POTENT FORCE, GLISTRUP'S PROGRESS PARTY IS LESS POPULAR THAN A YEAR AGO. HARTLING'S LIBERALS ARE PRACTICALLY ASSURED OF SUBSTANTIAL GAINS; HIS GAMBLE LIES IN WHETHER HIS ALLIES IN THE CENTER CAN ALSO REGAIN SOME OF THE VOTES LOST TO THE EXTREME

PARTIES LAST DECEMBER. IF THIS OCCURS, HE WILL BE IN A GOOD POSITION TO BARGAIN WITH THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS ON HIS "CRISIS PLAN".

6. COMMENT: IT IS CLEAR THAT HARTLING WANTED AN ELECTION AT THIS TIME AND ON THIS ISSUE; HE HAS CAREFULLY STRUCTURED THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION IN ACCORDANCE WITH HIS PARTY'S LONG-HELD POLITICAL STRATEGY. HIS PREVIOUS SUCCESSES WOULD SEEM TO SUGGEST THAT HE MIGHT PULL THIS ONE OFF AS WELL.
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